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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Delaware has begun several welfare reform programs that have a direct impact on early childhood development. But even the best preschool and early education programs are not enough to ensure that at-risk kids will become educated and self-confident adults. The prevailing view that early childhood care and education begins at birth and ends at the age of five is short-sighted. The gap between early childhood programs and programs for teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and dropouts is not just a gap; it is a failure. So while it is important to focus on early childhood programs, such work is wasted unless ways are found to follow through and work with the people responsible for children as they grow older. Government can do more to model its approach to human problems on the successful family. Delaware's "Focus on the First Sixty Months" program unified into a single effort Delaware's diverse attempts to help the state's youngest citizens. The next step will be to apply that approach to older children by including an early childhood component in every adult program, or by making an ongoing effort to relate lessons learned in adult programs to programs aimed at children. (RH)

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[NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD ISSUES--REMARKS]

REMARKS BY MICHAEL N. CASTLE

Governor of Delaware

PS 017386

National Conference on Early Childhood Issues

Washington, D.C.
November 17, 1988

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We have a tradition in Delaware.

Back in the old days, before computers and instant election returns, people used to gather in the county seats on Thursday after Election Day to hear the returns read.

Thursday was known as "Returns Day."

Today, we know who won and who lost in a matter of hours, but we still celebrate Returns Day in Georgetown, Delaware's southernmost county seat.

There's a parade, and politicians who fought each other tooth and nail during the campaign bury the hatchet, putting aside partisan differences so we can work together for the good of the state.

By tradition, opponents in statewide races -- governor, senator, congressman, and so forth -- even ride together in open carriages as part of the parade.

It's a big parade, and thousands of people line the parade route -- including lots of children.

During last Thursday's parade, I found myself wondering about those kids -- are they getting enough to eat, do their parents give them the love and encouragement they need, are they learning in school, are they warm at night?

It's impossible to tell, of course, because on a warm and sunny afternoon in November, any but the saddest and most neglected child can find joy in the spectacle of a parade.

But what about after the parade is over?

Well, fortunately, I have both the responsibility and the opportunity to ask that question -- and to do something about it if I don't like the answers.

That's a relatively new development in American government.

Not so long ago, too much of that power and responsibility was in the hands of the federal government.

I started to say "vested in the federal government" -- but that's wrong.

It was never vested in the federal government.

Beginning a few decades ago, the folks here in Washington began to appropriate both the power and the responsibility to make a difference in people's lives.

Sometimes the states abrogated their responsibility.

Sometimes the Congress usurped it in the face of inaction or inequities at the state level.

Sometimes it was a matter of judicial activism -- for real or imagined causes.

Mostly it was a combination of all three reasons, and I will leave it to the historians and historiographers to aportion blame.

Today it is different -- much different -- and as governor I have seized every opportunity to make my state as effective as possible at helping children.

I'd like to take a few minutes today to tell you about some of the things we have done in Delaware, recognizing that in an age of activist governors other states have done similar things, undertaken similiar initiatives.

I also want to talk about how these programs fit into a philosophy of government responsibility.

This is not only an era of activist governors -- but of catalyst government as well.

I say "catalyst" because I believe that government cannot, by itself, solve all of society's problems.

We cannot buy our way out of poverty; we cannot bribe kids to learn better; economic development that depends on cash grants and huge tax favors is short-sighted; government payments are no substitute for the dignity which welfare families have had to give up because of bad policies.

In Delaware, as in most states, we have concentrated many of our efforts and much of our hope for the future on the combination of public-private initiative . . . . and prevention.

It is my belief that the Office of Governor is most effective when it is most successful at getting other people to do things.

I began my first term as governor convinced that the state cannot afford to do all the good things that well-meaning people want it to do because it would bankrupt us.

As I prepare for my second term, I have seen nothing that changes my opinion.

Quite the contrary.

Today I am more convinced than ever that the state must do more to encourage and motivate individuals, organizations, businesses, institutions to do more.

I'm not suggesting that we should shift the burden of supporting basic services to private charities or privatize those services.

I'm saying simply that the vast non-government element of this country represents a tremendous source of untapped ideas and solutions, and that part of my role is to encourage the private sector to play a larger part.

President-elect Bush, in his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention, talked about a thousand points of light.

I think the wisdom of his observations was lost on a lot of the media.

From my experience, reporters are inclined to expect government to solve all of society's problems; most don't realize the tremendous role that churches, civic groups and charitable organization have always played in America.

But George Bush had identified one of the most powerful forces in this nation's life.

I would tell you, however, that there are many more than a thousand points of light -- a thousand thousand perhaps -- and the potential to make America a good place for everybody to live is virtually unlimited.

Government is not without its role, however.

Delaware in recent years has begun several programs which have a direct impact on early childhood development.

One of the programs combines and coordinates efforts by a number of cabinet departments, in the belief that a healthy start in life requires not only good learning skills or adequate diet, but satisfactory shelter, protection from abuse, and an environment which encourages and fosters growth.

One attacks the devastating problem of drop-outs.

Another encourages long-term welfare mothers to develop the skills they need to find and hold jobs.

One provides medical coverage for families making the transition from welfare to work.

What does welfare reform have to do with early childhood development?

It has to do with family pride.

It has to do with community role models.

It has to do with values.

A mother who has been helped break free of welfare dependency because she successfully completed remedial education courses and job training, who knows the pride that comes with independence, will foster that same pride in her young children.

It has to do with self-confidence and belief that there really are opportunities in the land of opportunity -- and we know well enough that children are voracious learners from the moment they leave the womb.

Certainly they learn attitudes -- whether it is an attitude of learned helplessness, or of self-confidence.

There's a tendency, I believe, to take a linear view of early childhood issues and our responsibilities in this area.

At the risk of oversimplifying, I would tell you that the prevailing view is that the job starts at birth -- and it ends at the age of five.

There is an invisible line in every child's life where education begins and early childhood programs end.

Well, that's wrong on two counts.

First, it is wrong to make a distinction between education and early childhood issues.

Second, it is wrong to believe that we have finished our job simply when kindergarten begins.

Over the past few years, we have focused on helping children until the age of five or six.

But then, too often, the kids are on their own until they are on the verge of dropping out at the age of 15 or 16.

That's ten years of lost opportunities.

We know that at-risk children who participate in Head Start programs start school on an equal footing with children from more affluent families.

Research also tells us that these same children, by third or fourth grade, seem to lose the advantage gained through Head Start.

That tells me that even the best pre-school and early education programs are not enough to ensure that at-risk kids will become educated and self-confident adults.

In Delaware, our drop out program is actually called "Children at Risk."

It isn't just a high school dropout program, because we know that we can identify potential dropouts in ofirst or second grade.

We know that we have to pay attention to these kids and follow them through, poised to step in at the first sign that they are losing faith in themselves, losing academic momentum, and in the process losing hope.

That gap between early childhood programs and teen pregancy programs, alcohol and drug abuse programs, dropout programs is not just a gap -- its is a failure.

Our failure.

So while it is important for you to focus on early childhood programs, you need to realize that your work is wasted unless you find a way to follow through and work with the people who have responsibility for those kids as they grow.

For a whole lot of good reasons, we tend to compartmentalize our our academic disciplines, our fields of expertise, our budgets and our programs.

But the best and most successful human service agency in the world -- the family -- operates on exactly the opposite principle.

There are no lines, no separate divisions.

A successful family, one which is capable of turning out ambitious, well-adjusted, hard-working kids with an enthusiasm for learning . . . . is an enormously complicated institution.

For that family to work properly, it must combine food and shelter, love and discipline, freedom and control, support and independence, an appreciation for play and work, a respect for learning and society's rules and values -- all in the proper proportions.

That family must make sure that the lessons stick -- which requires discipline and obedience -- but that independence and curiosity are fostered as well.

For <u>our</u> efforts to work, for government to succeed in repairing damaged lives and helping people lead free and productive lives, we must learn how to approach our work in the same way.

We can't duplicate the complex systems of the family, but we can do more to model our approach to human problems on the family, and in the process make our efforts effective.

Delaware's "Focus on the First Sixty Months," which served as the model for a national initiative through the National Governors' Association, is predicated on the idea that programs for young children must be comprehensive and coordinated.

It doesn't do any good to feed a child if we allow the child to be neglected, to clothe a child if we ignore the fact that the child suffers from learning disabilities.

"Focus on the First Sixty Months" unified Delaware's diverse efforts to help our youngest citizens into a single, all-encompassing effort.

The next step is to apply that same approach to older children.

Since "Focus" began, we have added a children-at-risk project, "Community of Caring" to reduce teen pregnancy, "Adopt a School" mentor programs, school-based health clinics, among other things.

We know that we can trace most adult problems back to earliest childhood, but I think we have spent too little time tracing back solutions.

It is not too farfetched to suggest that every adult program should have an early childhood element, or at least an ongoing effort to relate the lessons learned in those programs to programs aimed at children.

* * *

At no time in my political career have I sensed a greater openness, at both the state and national levels, to innovation and change.

As I watch the formation of the Bush Administration, I become increasingly confident that the next four years will see an extensive and productive dialog develop between Washington and the states.

A balance will be struck.

Broad national goals will be defined, and then we will find ways to give the states the authority and the responsibility to meet those goals.

For those of us who are deeply involved, not only in early childhood issues, but in the entire range of human services, there is a unique opportunity to effect good and lasting changes in American life.

I believe the next four years offer greater opportunities for real progress, for the development of programs that work, than ever before.

All you and I have to do is take advantage of those opportunities -- because we will find the support and encouragement we need in the White House.

Thank you.